

Message Text

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SUBJECT: BOLIVIAN CAMPESINOS PROPOSE CANCELLATION OF 1975
ELECTIONS

REFERENCE LA PAZ 6925, 6804

1. SUMMARY: LEADERS OF BOLIVIA'S CAMPESINO MAJORITY, IN MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENT BANZER AND THE ARMED FORCES HIGH COMMAND ON OCTOBER 31, PRESENTED A LENGTHILY-DOCUMENTED APPEAL FOR THE CANCELLATION OF THE 1975 ELECTIONS. IN SO DOING, THE CAMPESINOS ARE LIKELY TO PROVOKE A MAJOR TEST OF STRENGTH FOR THE BANZER GOVERNMENT, SINCE BOTH OPPOSITIONISTS AND CONSIDERABLE NUMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S OWN SUPPORTERS IN THE MILITARY AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES STRONGLY SUPPORT THE DESIREABILITY OF HOLDING ELECTIONS IN 1975 AND TRANSFERRING POWER TO A NEW PRESIDENT. PRESIDENT BANZER THUS FACES A NEW CRISIS WHICH THREATENS TO WEAKEN THE UNITY OF HIS ALREADY FRAGMENTED POLITICAL COALITION, WHILE PROVIDING ANTI-REGIME ELEMENTS WITH A POTENT POLITICAL ISSUE. END SUMMARY.

2. LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL CAMPESINO CONFEDERATION OF BOLIVIA PRESENTED PRESIDENT BANZER AND THE ARMED FORCES HIGH COMMAND WITH A SERIES OF POLITICAL PROPOSALS ON OCTOBER 31, HIGHLIGHTED BY A CALL FOR THE CANCELLATION OF THE 1975
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ELECTIONS. THE CAMPESINO LEADERS, IN A LENGTHY WRITTEN STATEMENT, CLAIMED THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTIONS FOR

1975 HAS CREATED A "CLIMATE OF POLITICAL INTRANQUALLITY", CAUSED BY THE RENEWAL OF PARTISAN ACTIVITY ON THE PART OF BOTH LEFTIST AND PROGOVERNMENT POLITICIANS. IN ADDITION, THE DOCUMENT CLAIMS THAT AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN WOULD DIVERT GOVERNMENT ATTENTION AND FUNDS FROM NEEDED PROJECTS, PARTICULARLY IN THE RURAL AREAS, WHILE DIVIDING THE NATION AT A TIME WHEN IT IS THREATENED BY THE ONSET OF A POTENTIAL CONFLICT BETWEEN CHILE AND PERU.

3. WHILE PRAISING PRESIDENT BANZER AND THE ARMED FORCES IN HIGH TERMS, THE CAMPESINO'S POLITICAL DOCUMENT HAS HARSH WORDS FOR THE THREE POLITICAL PARTIES MAKING UP THE GOVERNMENT'S NATIONALIST POPULAR FRONT COALITION. DEMANDS BY THE MNR AND FSB THAT ELECTIONS BE HELD IN 1975, AND THAT THEIR PARTIES BE GRANTED ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE, ARE FIRMLY REJECTED BY THE DOCUMENT, WHICH CLAIMS THAT THESE PARTIES WULD PURSUE MERELY SELFISH OBJECTIVES OF POLITICAL PROSELYTICATION SHOULD THE WAY BE OPENED FOR THEIR ENTRY INTO THE CAMPO. IN REACTION, THE MNR (RUBEN JULIO SECTOR) HAS PUBLICLY THREATENED TO ABSTAIN FROMTHE ELECTIONS IF IT IS DENIED ACCESS TO THE CAMPESINOS. AT THE SAME TIME, THE CAMPESINO LEADERS ATTACH CONARE, THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON STRUCTURAL REFORMS NOW AGAIN BEING PRESIDED OVER BY BARRIENTISTA LEADER EDWIN TAPIA, CLAIMING THAT THE DRAFT ELECTORAL STATUTE AND POLITICAL PARTIES LAW PREPARED BY THAT BODY ARE IRRELEVANT TO THE CURRENT NEEDS OF THE BOLIVIAN PEOPLE.

4. COMMENT: THE CAMPESINOS' DECLARATION RE-OPENS A SERIES OF POLITICAL QUESTIONS WHICH APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN RESOLVED BY PRESIDENT BANZER'S OCTOBER 8 SPEECH, ANNOUNCING THAT HE WOULD NOT BE A CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY AND THAT A NEW PRESIDENT WOULD TAKE OFFICE ON AUGUST 6, 1975. NOW OPPOSITION POLITICIANS, DISCONTENTED MILITARY OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF THE TRI-PARTY FPN COALITION MAY AGAIN CONCLUDE THAT BANZER IS NOT SINCERE IN HIS EXPRESSED DESIRE TO HOLD ELECTIONS AND RELINQUISH POWER IN 1975 TO AN ELECTED SUCCESSOR. CONCERN AMONG THESE GROUPS ALREADY HAD RISEN DURING RECENT WEEKS AS GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN HINTED THAT A BRIEF TERRORIST CAMPAIGN IN LA PAZ, TOGETHER WITH GROWING FEARS OF THE IMPACT ON
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BOLIVIA OF ANY PERU-CHILE CONFLICT (SEE REFTELS), MIGHT LEAD THE BANZER GOVERNMENT TO CANCEL THE 1975 ELECTIONS. COUP PLOTTERS, WHO HAVE AGAIN BEEN ACTIVE RECENTLY, ARE PARTICULARLY LIKELY TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY AFFORDED THEM BY THE CAMPESINO LEADERS' STATEMENT TO SITR UP UNREST AMONG DISCONTENTED CIVILIAN AND MILITARY ELEMENTS. KNOWLEDGEABLE BOLIVIAN OBSERVERS NOTE THAT THE CAMPESINO LEADERS, AS SALARIED OFFICIALS WHO OCCUPY THEIR POSTS AT GOVERNMENT SUFFERANCE, WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO ISSUE SUCH A MAJOR POLITICAL STATEMENT WITHOUT THE PRIOR AGREEMENT OF PRESIDENT

BANZER AND THE ARMED FORCES HIGH COMMAND.

5. WHILE PROVIDING THE OPPOSITION TO THE BANZER GOVERNMENT WITH A POTENT POLITICAL ISSUE, THIS DECLARATION ALSO DRIVES A WEDGE BETWEEN TWO OF THE MAJOR SUPPORTING ELEMENTS OF THE CURRENT REGIME: THE CAMPESINO MAJORITY OF THE POPULACE AND THE THREE URBAN-BASED POLITICAL PARTIES. ACCEPTANCE OF THE CAMPESINOS' DEMANDS WOULD PROVOKE THE ALIENTATION, AND POSSIBLE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE GOVERNMENT, OF THE PARTIES, WHEREAS REJECTION OF THE CAMPESINOS' POSITION WOULD PROVOKE A CRISIS IN THE GOB'S RELATIONS WITH ITS PASSIVE MASS OF CAMPESINO SUPPORTERS. THUS, THE BANZER GOVERNMENT FACES A SERIOUS DILEMMA, FROM WHICH IT PROBABLY CAN ONLY EMERGE MORE WEAKENED AND DIVIDED THAN BEFORE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE GOB RISKS PROVOKING THE FORMATION OF A LARGER AND MORE UNITED OPPOSITION COALITION THAN IT HAS FACED TO DATE OVER THE POWERFUL UNIFYING ISSUES OF ELECTIONS AND THE FEAR OF CONTINUISMO BY BANZER AND HIS HIGH-LEVEL MILITARY SUPPORTERS.

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